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ABSTRACT

A study examined the systemic reform process initiated in Maryland in 1991. The Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP) consists of learning outcomes, a framework for performance assessment, guidelines for school decision making, and suggestions for staff development. One year following the initiation of the MSPAP, semi-structured interviews were conducted with district-level administrators responsible for reading and language arts in the state, regarding their perception of the objectives, the influence of the program on district goals, and policies for instructional change. Learning outcomes were accurately perceived as requiring students to apply language to real-world problems and to construct meaning from a diversity of texts. The most frequently cited instructional innovations were the teaching of reading-language arts through subject matters of the curriculum, and the use of trade books for reading instruction. The MSPAP was perceived by 24% of administrators as legitimating reforms already underway in their districts. Although some districts adopted some of the state-wide goals, and some of the instructional changes were tied to some of the goals, a broad-reaching, coherent program based on a vision for student literacy learning, coupled with an instructional guidance system and supported by a revised governance structure was not evident at this early stage of the reform process. (Contains 15 references.) (Author/RS)

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Policies for Integrated Reading Instruction
Related to a State-Wide Improvement Program

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Abstract

This study examined the systemic reform process that was initiated in the State of Maryland in 1991. The Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP) consists of: learning outcomes, a framework for performance assessment, guidelines for school decision making and suggestions for staff development. One year following the initiation of the MSPAP, we conducted a semi-structured interview with the District-level administrators responsible for reading and language arts in the State, regarding their perception of the objectives, the influence of the program on District goals, and policies for instructional change. Learning outcomes were accurately perceived as requiring students to apply language to real-world problems and to construct meaning from a diversity of texts. The most frequently cited instructional innovations were the teaching of reading-language arts through subject matters of the curriculum, and the use of trade books for reading instruction. The MSPAP was perceived by 24% of administrators as legitimating reforms already underway in their districts. The extent to which the MSPAP fulfills the Smith & O'Day (1991) formulation of providing a unifying vision and goals, generating a coherent instructional guidance system and restructuring the governance system is discussed.

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BACKGROUND

Rationale for the Study.

Leadership in education at the national level is placing an increased emphasis on systemic reform. Although there are many perspectives on this issue, we have used the framework described by Smith and O'Day (1991) as the point of departure for our inquiry. Smith and O'Day emphasize three components in the process of systemic school reform:

- 1) a unifying vision and goals, that are informed by underlying values concerning intellectually stimulating and engaging education for all students, and that can be communicated and measured in a convincing fashion;
- 2) a coherent instructional guidance system, that contains content goals, curricular materials, professional development opportunities for teachers, and assessments that monitor progress toward goals and support superior instruction; and

3) a restructured governance system, in which schools are accorded autonomy and teachers participate in decision making to utilize resources allocated by districts.

At the heart of several different systemic reform plans (Ravich, 1993; Smith and O'Day, 1991; Spady, 1994) are statements of desirable student outcomes. In all cases, these statements are expressions of the qualities of students that will enable them to show their knowledge, use their learning strategies, pursue their personal interests, participate in social organizations, and contribute productively to an expanding technological economy. Goals for reading are now expressed in terms of multiple literacies that go far beyond basic decoding, even beyond basic factual knowledge, to encompass how people communicate, think and attack problems. The knowledge upon which literacies draw is seen as personal, not objective; contingent, not fixed. Literate people are engaged in the constant creation, interpretation and reinterpretation of knowledge, weaving it in and out of personal and societal narratives about the most fundamental human concerns (Brown, 1991).

Such higher-order outcomes are accentuated in outcome-based education. Spady (1994) recommends that students should demonstrate transformational literacy consists of real-life functioning, as well as transitional literacy that represents complex task performances, and literacy in the traditional sense of discrete, simple processes. The pivotal nature of outcomes in the systemic reform process was underscored by Ravich (1993) who noted that "Standards are the starting point of education reform...In the absence of national standards, we have evolved a haphazard, accidental, disconnected curriculum based on mass-market textbooks

and standardized, multiple choice tests. Education reform must begin with broad agreement on what children should learn." (p. 772).

Just as standards for mathematics learning were devised and widely disseminated by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, and science Standards have recently been formulated by the American Association for the Advancement of Science for science-education, the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association are developing standards in English/Language Arts. Whereas these standards have been written by professional organizations, a comprehensive set of standards in English, Math, and other subject matters is being composed by the New Standards Project, which is privately funded and conducted through the Learning Research and Development Center and the National Center for Education and the Economy. All of these initiatives aspire to defining the aims of education as qualities of students that will foster the best interests of citizens and the cultural and economic growth of the society.

A second phase in systemic reform is the development of an instructional guidance system (Smith & O'Day, 1991). In addition to curricular goals and materials, assessments are incorporated into instructional guidance designed to measure how fully students are attaining the desirable outcomes and standards. Assessments are expected to depart from traditional standardized, norm referenced measures in several regards. Because the assessments are criterion referenced, their content validity is at a premium. The tasks must be inherently interesting, valuable and productive for the student, and sensitive to the educational and cultural circumstances of the schools. The outcomes of the assessments are not intended to differentiate among students nor predict future performance as a primary feature. Results are

expected to define how well students are performing tasks that will be valuable to them in future schooling and to their cultural participation. Several investigations have been directed to the identification of the characteristics needed in alternative assessments of literacy and the trade-offs between traditional and portfolio or performance assessments (Schafer, Guthrie, Almasi, & Afflerbach, 1994; Valencia, Heibert & Afflerbach, 1993.)

The third phase of the reform scenario involves school responsibility, and governance. Assessments themselves do not improve learning. Policy makers and teachers concur that it is change in instruction that will be the immediate resource for improved student achievement. In the scenario depicted by Ravitch (1993), schools are assumed to be responsible institutions that are sensitive to the basis on which they are being judged. When assessments are conducted that provide visibility for school accomplishments, and the assessments are viewed as credible by teachers and administrators, schools will revise and redesign their mission and activities to promote the attainment of those goals. This emphasis on school responsibility was articulated in America 2000 during the Bush administration and by President Clinton in his campaign publication Putting People First. However, Clark and Astuto (1994) contend that a system that emphasizes teacher and school accountability for meeting goals will de-professionalize teachers and generate antagonism among school personnel.

Enhancement of school responsibility should be based not on accountability processes, argue Clark and Astuto (1994), but on the development of communities of teachers who are treated like professionals. As decision makers, teachers should participate in communities of democratic discourse (Darling-Hammond, 1993). Principals should lead the professional

community to design, critique and improve structures and norms of professional practice and reflection. Central to productive school communities are organizational plans that create time for teacher planning and sharing, as well as the cultivation of a culture of common beliefs about the learning and teaching of literacy (Donohoe, 1993). At the state level, a variety of administrations have emphasized site-based on management procedures which allow and encourage schools to exercise freedom in rethinking instruction for the purpose of attaining commonly held goals of student learning. Although some authors claim that restructuring of the governance system is the essence of systemic reform (Sashkin & Egermeier, 1993), this view may not place sufficient emphasis on instructional revision.

Systemic reforms based on education standards contain a pivotal assumption about instruction. The organizations that promote and disseminate education standards do not expect that standards themselves will accelerate student learning. These organizations do not, furthermore, assume that assessments designed to measure the standards will promote student learning in themselves. The pivotal assumption is that schools will generate new instructional designs, reorganize themselves to implement these designs and follow through on implementation to assure that student learning follows the profile written into the original statement of outcomes.

The systemic approach to educational reform that is embraced by a broad array of national leaders is precarious because it rests on an untested hypothesis. The hypothesis is that a consensus regarding standards, and administration of suitable assessments will induce creative revisions of instruction that modify student learning. Although the hypothesis is plausible and it has been assumed to be true in some circles (Newton & Tarrant, 1992), the

hypothesis has not been tested, demonstrated, or confirmed at the level that one might find to be advisable considering its central role in this national movement. The aim of this present study was to explore this hypothesis.

Assumptions regarding the Public Interest

Several fundamental assumptions regarding education in a democratic society undergird the national school reform proposals and the reform initiative in Maryland. Although most readers will find these precepts to be self-evident, others will not necessarily concur with all of them.

Education systems in States are constituted by public law for the public good. Citizens from many walks of life invest a portion of their income for the education of their own children, which is a personal benefit. The public further supports the teaching of all children for the benefit of the culture in which they live. The public interest is personal, cultural and economic. Because the public assumes the responsibility for funding and sustaining schools, the same public claims a legitimate right to participate in defining the aims and shaping the means of education. Not only does the public possess the right to participate in education, but it is obliged to formulate desirable outcomes for its youth and setting sensible plans into motion for attaining these outcomes.

The population affirms, by virtue of its voting patterns, that it believes it is important to articulate a set of collective educational aims; it is prudent to design a set of efficient means to attain these aims; and it is sensible to monitor how well the aims are being accomplished. Within a rational society, the future of children is considered to be well served

by discussions of how the most widely endorsed benefits of schooling can be provided to the largest proportion of the youth over the longest possible period of time.

Questions of the Investigation

The basic questions of this investigation were designed to aid in determining how well the reform process unfolds in actual practice. In the context of a newly instituted statewide systemic reform program, we asked several questions: (1) Do district-level administrators express understanding and consensus about the State-level standards for student outcomes? (2) Do administrators perceive the frameworks for performance assessment that incorporate higher order reading outcomes perceived as the authors intended? (3) What kind of instructional and organizational revisions are being made in this reform context? (4) How are instructional revisions related to the performance assessment?

METHOD

Rationale for Method

This study examined the policies and practices during the educational reform process in the State of Maryland. The rationale for choosing Maryland is that the blueprint for educational reform in this State is similar to the designs for reform that are promoted at the national level. Similar to the plans presented in America 2000 and Putting People First, the Maryland School Performance Program contains the following five essential components:

- (1) Identification of learning outcomes which was completed in May 1990. The outcomes include satisfactory performance for all students in reading, math, science, social studies and writing, as well as functional literacy for all students.
- (2) Development of performance standards which refers to statements of desirable student outcomes at the end of designated grade levels.

- (3) Designed administration of performance assessments, which was initiated in 1990-1991.
- (4) Instructional/school improvements to assist students in meeting the standards; and,
- (5) Public reports of school, school district, and state-level results.

Maryland State Education Goals

The State Board of Education adopted goals for public education on May 22, 1990.

The State Department of Education developed ten goals that defined the state education outcomes at the broadest level. The goals are as follows:

- Goal 1 Ninety five percent of Maryland's students will start first grade ready to learn as demonstrated by readiness assessments.
- Goal 2 Maryland will rank in the top five states in the Nation on National and International comparisons of student achievement and other measures of student success.
- Goal 3 One hundred percent of Maryland's students will be functionally literate in reading, writing, mathematics and citizenship.
- Goal 4 Ninety five percent of Maryland's students will achieve satisfactory levels in mathematics, science, reading, social studies, and writing/language arts on State-developed measures.
- Goal 5 Fifty percent of Maryland students will achieve excellence in mathematics, science, reading, social studies, and writing/language arts on State-developed measures.
- Goal 6 The number of Maryland students pursuing post secondary studies in mathematics, science and technology, will increase by fifty percent.
- Goal 7 Ninety five percent of Maryland students will achieve a high school diploma and will be prepared for post secondary education, employment or both.

- Goal 8 Ninety percent of Maryland students who drop out of school will secure a high school diploma by age 25.
- Goal 9 One hundred percent of Maryland citizens will be literate.
- Goal 10 Maryland schools will be free of drugs and alcohol and will provide a safe environment conducive to learning.

Standards in Reading

Three aspects of reading are contained in the statement of desired outcomes for students in reading: literary experience, comprehending informative text and reading to perform tasks.

the objectives in the literary experience aspect of the Standards consisted of the following:

- * identify the most important event in a story
- * summarize the story, play or poem
- * identify the lesson or moral in a fable
- * identify major conflict in a selection
- * identify theme
- * describe the setting by drawing a picture
- * complete a graphic organizer
- * present what main things happened
- * infer traits, attitudes and motives of characters
- * interpret the expressions of characters
- * locate descriptions of the settings
- * reading aloud with expression
- * list the events that lead to the climax of a story
- * compare actions of characters to ones actions in a similar situation
- * discuss the conflict of a selection in light one's own experiences
- * identify feelings of characters that are like ones you have had
- * analyze the author's perspective
- * show how the author makes the story into a fantasy

Some of the goals that pertain to comprehending informative text were the following:

- * summarize the passage or tell what it is about
- * restate information from the text
- * infer the attitudes of people in a text
- * describe what course of action one might take based on the text

- * tell whether you agree or disagree with information from a selection
- * identify the organizational structure of a selection
- * judge the accuracy of an account
- * evaluate the effectiveness of an author's argument
- * describe the significance of illustrations and graphics to the total selection
- * identify bias or propaganda in a text

Goals within the aspect of reading to perform tasks included the following:

- * identify who would use a document such as a map
- * identify how someone would use the document
- * describe the central idea in a document
- * paraphrase directions
- * fill in a form with information
- * draw inferences from information contained in two types of documents
- * identify information within a document that one might need to complete a task
- * compare a form in a document to something in one's experience
- * identify points of confusion in a document
- * compare two sets of directions or two displays of information

These exemplify the goals and desired outcomes in the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program. The list is not comprehensive, but it illustrates the text types and the response expectations. A full set of the outcomes, which are accompanied by rubrics for scoring the responses to the reading tasks are included in another study being conducted by the NRRC.

Construction and Administration of the 1991 Performance Assessment

The reading portion of the Maryland School Performance Assessment was constructed by read specialists and teachers who represented all regions in the State of Maryland. Based on the reading Standards, teams of teachers designed reading and writing tasks to provide students opportunities to display their competencies to the fullest possible extent. The reading materials and the tasks consisted of intact stories, lengthy expository passages, and a variety of documents such as illustrations, maps and directions. The questions required students to

respond at multiple levels of comprehension and thinking. Lower level reproductive tasks were combined with expectations for higher order integration of ideas and critical response to text. Understanding concepts in science, social studies, and math and presenting written expressions of those understandings were required.

The reading portion of the assessment was administered in conjunction with the math and writing portions during a 3-day period in all Maryland elementary schools. Teachers administered assessments to students within their own schools, but they did not administer them to students for whom they had teaching responsibilities. The student responses were coded according to rubrics developed by teams of teachers led the Supervisor of Reading for the State of Maryland. The psychometric properties of the assessment the coding schemes and the student responses are the subject of another study sponsored by the National Reading Research Center. It is sufficient to point out here that the content validity of the tasks were regarded as substantially high and the reliabilities of coding the student responses were sufficiently high to meet the purpose of school-building-level instructional program evaluation.

School-Based Instructional Decision Making

Central to the design of the Maryland School Performance Program is instructional decision making at the school level. The Maryland School Program is an outcome-based system which holds each school accountable for the achievement of its students. School-based instructional decision making is grounded in the belief that those responsible for the implementation of a program should be actively involved in the requisite planning and decision making. Faculty and administrators in each school should be given as much

autonomy as possible within the school system's constraints to exercise judgment in developing the curriculum. An operational recommended by the State Department of Education was that "instructional decision making refers to the process of involving school staffs in making decisions related to the delivery of instruction designed to achieve desired student learning outcomes." (MSPAP, p. 2)

It was expected that school-based should be based on analysis and understand of student learning data. Using the data, schools were expected to rethink and possibly redesign their teaching strategies, grouping of students, assessment of student learning, instructional media, use of space and equipment and parental and community involvement. Schools were, furthermore, expected to reconsider their scheduling of instruction, allocating discretionary monies, differentiating curricula, using professional and para professional staff, and expanding their external learning opportunities such field trips and projects in the community. Although this decision making frame identifies some perspective reforms of instruction at a generic level, the reforms are not specific to the reading program. Our purpose was to identify how policies and practices for teaching reading were influenced by the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program.

Purposes of the Survey

This survey consisted of an interview with the administrators who are responsible for reading programs in each school district county in the state of Maryland. The purpose was to describe these administrators' views of the Maryland Performance Assessment, and the instructional policies and practices in reading that have been developed in response to the performance assessment program.

Participants in the Survey

Twenty-one representatives from the 24 school districts in Maryland participated in the investigation (87.5%). Nineteen were females and two were males. Twenty of the individuals worked in their respective Board of Education offices and held positions such as: Supervisor of Reading (5), Supervisor of Elementary Education (5), Supervisor of Instruction (3), Supervisor of Language Arts (3), Director of Curriculum (2), Reading Specialist, Principal and Coordinator of Chapter 1 and Testing. Nine of these individuals had doctoral degrees. Because school district are organized by counties within Maryland, the terms "school district" and "county" may be used as synonyms in what follows.

Administration of the Survey

County superintendents of instruction were contacted and asked to submit the names of one or more representative from the county who were knowledgeable about the ways in which reading instruction in elementary schools may have changed as a result of the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program. This process yielded a total of 59 possible interviewees. One representative from each school district was contacted with a request to be interviewed. Twenty-one of the 24 individuals contacted participated. All others were invited to submit their responses to the interview questions in writing.

Each representative was sent a letter stating the purpose of the research project, their role in the project, and the questions that would be asked during the interview. Interviews were conducted by telephone and each representative was asked the entire set of questions. Responses were recorded as fully as possible by hand.

The interview consisted of 13 items that were drafted by a team of four researchers familiar with educational measurement, assessment, classroom procedures, and the MSPAP itself. The goals of the interview were to: (a) determine what types of changes were occurring at a county-level in response to the MSPAP and, (b) identify one or two elementary schools within the district that were making exemplary changes in response to the MSPAP. The second goal was included as part of another study and will not be considered here.

Questions of the Survey.

The questions used are presented next (questions 1-8 are pertinent to this study):

1. In your view, what are the most important objectives measured by the reading/language arts portions of the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP)?
2. At the time the MSPAP was first administered in 1991, how well-aligned were the reading/language arts portions of the MSPAP with the curricular goals of your county?
3. Have your county's curricular goals changed as a result of the MSPAP?
 - o Can you describe them?
4. Have there been any changes in the amount or type of reading and writing instruction used in your county as a result of the reading/language arts portions of the MSPAP?
5. Have there been any district-wide curricular adaptations in terms of goals and/or materials used to accommodate instructional changes as a result of the MSPAP?
6. Are students in your county better readers now as a result of these instructional changes?

- How do you know?
7. Are there any groups of students that have been targeted for special activities because of the MSPAP?
 8. What other instructional or curricular decisions have resulted from the MSPAP?
 9. Can you name one or two elementary schools in your county that you feel represent examples of schools that are making changes as a result of the MSPAP?
(Ask if respondent comments that their county was responding in ways similar to the MSPAP prior to its implementation)
 - A school that had maximum change irrespective of what was happening before the MSPAP.
 - A school that has maximum change that is consistent with the MSPAP
 10. What innovations are being made in these schools?
 11. Are there any special programs that characterize these schools (e.g., federal funding, magnet schools, etc.)?
 - How would you describe the relationship between administration and faculty at these particular schools?
 12. What demographic information characterizes these schools in terms of: racial composition, attendance, socio-economic status, and school population?
 - Racial composition:
 - Attendance:
 - Socio-economic status:
 - School population:

13. What county procedures should be attended to should we wish to interview teachers and other professionals in these schools as part of this research effort?

Coding Responses to the Interviews

Responses of the interviewees to each question were written in abbreviated form by the interviewer, who is the second author of this paper. The first author of the paper compared these abbreviated responses to the field notes taken by the interviewer on each question. The abbreviated responses to each question were discussed and any differences between these two authors were resolved. Coding of the interviews then consisted of performing a frequency count to determine the number of participants in the survey who expressed each of the different abbreviated responses to each of the 13 questions in the interview. The results of the survey are presented next.

RESULTS

The findings from the survey are presented for each question. The proportion of administrators of reading in each county that expressed each of their responses to their questions are included.

Question 1: In your view what are the most important objectives measured by the reading/language arts portions of the Maryland School Performance Program?

<u>Total</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Response</u>
8	38.1	Constructing meaning across a variety of texts
8	38.1	Applying language and critical thinking to real-world problems
7	33.3	All are important
7	33.3	Writing in response to reading stances
5	23.8	Constructing meaning using different stances
5	23.8	Strategic reading
4	19.0	Creating motivated readers
4	19.0	Integration across the curriculum

2	9.5	Use of personal experiences
2	9.5	Reading comprehension
1	4.8	Reading as a literary experience
1	4.8	Collaboration among students

Question 2: At the time the MSPAP was first administered in 1991, how well aligned were the reading/language arts portions of the MSPAP with the curricular goals of your county?

<u>Total</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Response</u>
5	23.8	Highly
8	61.9	Moderately
3	14.3	Not at all

Question 3: Have your county's curricular goals changed as a results of the MSPAP?

<u>Total</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Response</u>
5	23.8	Changed substantially
8	38.1	Changed slightly
8	38.1	No change

Reason for No Change

<u>Total</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Reason</u>
7	87.5	had prior consistency
1	12.5	no change yet

Of those who reported change, how have county's goals changed?

(N=18 some of those who reported no change reported ways that the goals had changed)

<u>Total</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Response</u>
7	38.9	MSPAP helped refine, served as impetus, or vehicle for implementing ideas that were already underway
7	38.9	Integration across the curriculum
6	33.3	Use of trade books, literature
4	22.2	Developed new reading guides
3	16.7	Emphasize the process approach more now
3	16.7	Cooperative learning
3	33.3	Adopted the stances (Reading to perform a task, to inform, for literary experience)
3	16.7	Developed new county-wide assessments

2	11.1	Flexible grouping
<u>Total</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Response</u>
2	11.1	Vernacular has changed
2	11.1	Use of strategies
1	5.5	Provided teachers with more of an opportunity to make instructional decisions
1	5.5	Teachers are being inserviced
1	5.5	Success for all students
1	5.5	Emphasize different types of writing

Question 4: Have there been any changes in the amount or type of reading and writing instruction used in your county as a result of the reading/language arts portions of the MSPAP?

<u>Total</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Response</u>
13	61.9	Integrating reading, writing with content
8	38.1	Purchased/used more trade books
7	33.3	Increase in amount of writing/process writing
5	23.8	Provide inservice for teachers
4	19.0	Cooperative Learning
4	19.0	Use a language arts block
4	19.0	More writing in response to reading
3	14.3	Increased use of expository text
3	14.3	Read for a variety of purposes
3	14.3	Writing for different purposes
3	14.3	Flexible grouping
3	14.3	Thinking strategies/Dimensions of Thinking
2	9.5	Increase amount of reading
1	4.8	Peer response
1	4.8	Strategy instruction
1	4.8	Emphasize positive attitudes

Question 5: Have there been any district-wide adaptations in terms of goals and/or materials used to accommodate instructional changes as a result of the MSPAP?

<u>Total</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Response</u>
10	47.6	Literature-based instruction/thematic units/integration
6	28.6	Handbooks, manual, curriculum guides changed
5	23.8	Developed own assessment instrument
4	19.0	Dimensions of thinking
4	19.0	Strategic Planning Committees organized
3	14.3	Flexible grouping
2	9.5	Grading/reporting policies changed
2	9.5	Cooperative learning
2	9.5	Responding to writing prompts
2	9.5	None
1	4.8	Infusing staff development days into calendar
1	4.8	Resources too limited due to budget to do much
1	4.8	Notion of reading as a transaction
1	4.8	Implemented a new unit planning model for teachers
1	4.8	Collaboration with other counties
1	4.8	Supervisors work in coordination with one another
1	4.8	Developmental spelling

Question 6a: Are students in your County better readers now as a result of these instructional changes?

<u>Total</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Response</u>
6	28.6	Yes
5	23.8	Slightly better
8	38.1	Too early to determine
2	9.5	Same

Question 6b: How do you know?

(N=12) Includes all that responded 'year,' 'slightly better,' and one who responded 'same'

<u>Total</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Response</u>
2	16.7	Better writers
6	50.0	Enjoy reading more
		◦ Pick up more books
		◦ Check out more books from School library
		◦ Have incentive programs
		◦ Observational means

		◦ Sustained Silent Reading
		◦ Book Clubs
		◦ County Library used more
4	33.3	Reading comprehension scores on CTBS improving
2	16.7	Through County CRT, Basal Placement tests, Gates-MacGinitie

Question 7: Are there any groups of students that have been targeted for special activates because of the MSPAP?

<u>Total</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Response</u>
16	76.2	No
	<u>Total</u>	<u>%</u>
	8	50.0
	8	50.0
	<u>Total</u>	<u>%</u>
	7	87.5
		at-risk; Chapter 1, Reading recovery
	0	0.0
	1	12.5
	1	12.5
		Middle School
		Special Education
		Highly Able Readers
5	23.8	Yes
	<u>Total</u>	<u>%</u>
	3	60.0
	2	40.0
	2	40.0
	2	40.0
		at-risk; Chapter 1, Reading recovery
		Middle School
		Special Education
		Highly Able Readers

DISCUSSION

Administrators of reading in the State of Maryland thought that the reading portion Maryland School Performance Assessment Program emphasized: 1) constructing meaning across a variety of text, 2) applying language and critical thinking capabilities to real world problems and 3) writing extensively to express interpretations and critical responses to text. The administrators viewed these objectives of the Improvement Program and the Performance Assessment as substantially different from the reading tasks that are prominent in standardized reading measures such as the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills that has been used previously in the state. Despite these trends, there was not a widespread agreement, regarding these goals. Approximately one third of the administrators thought integrated reading competencies were a priority; another one third percent stated critical thinking was a major goal; and another one third identified writing as the most important outcome in the framework. These administrators did not possess a common vision for education that most writers on systemic reform advocate (Smith & O'Day, 1991).

The administrators viewed the objectives of the Performance Assessment to be moderately well-aligned with the existing curricular goals of their counties. Approximately 62% of the administrators indicated that their goals were aligned moderately well with the assessment at the time of its first administration. Despite this degree of initial consistency, however, 62% indicated their counties' curricular goals had changed substantially or changed slightly to increase their consistency with the learning outcomes contained in the objectives of the assessment. The administrators who indicated that no change had occurred in the

curricular goals stated in overwhelming proportions that their goals were consistent prior to administration of the Performance Assessment and there was little need for altering them.

Five types of district-level policy changes prevailed in these reports. The administrators emphasized increases in each of the following:

- * integration of reading into other content areas;
- * use of trade books and literature as a basis for reading instruction;
- * broadening the curriculum to include the goals of literary experience, comprehending exposition, and reading to perform tasks;
- * cooperative learning as a more important feature of student learning experiences; and
- * development of new County-wide assessments.

Because these changes brought the instructional goals and materials (books) into a closer alignment with the desired outcomes, the policy for instructional guidance showed a discernable coherence of the kind recommended by Smith and O'Day, (1991).

One aspect of the systemic reform scenario that was not evident in the district-policies for reading was change in the level or type of school responsibility and governance. Administrators rarely (only 19 percent) formed teacher-planning teams to address the new student learning goals. Few administrators (4 percent) reported that they were working with other districts; and few (5 percent) indicated that teachers were given more instructional decisions. The vibrant school-wide teacher discourse advocated by Darling-Hammond (1993) and Clark and Astuto (1994) was not observed in these districts.

Asked whether the students are better readers as a result of changes taking place following the Performance Assessment Program, a plurality of administrators indicated that it was too early to determine this potential impact. Those administrators who reported positive impacts on student learning said that they perceived students to be more fully engaged with reading as a school and recreational activity. They reported that students appear to check out more books from the school library, enjoy incentive programs, request silent reading in schools, participate in book clubs, and use the county library more frequently than they did prior to the administration of the Performance Assessment. Some administrators noted that they thought the reading comprehension scores on the comprehensive test of basic skills standardized measure were improving. Administrators reported that these curricular shifts were very demanding on the time, ingenuity and management capabilities of the administrators and teachers.

The MSPAP was a catalyst for new thinking among many administrators. Because the Assessment was designed, composed and administered by teachers, it was reasonably consistent with administrators' and teachers' beliefs. This consistency enabled the assessment to spur the implementation of constructive instructional options. The Assessment lead to the introduction of more complex reading, writing, and thinking activities and it spawned a richer context for the performance of those tasks than previous testing systems have permitted. The inclusion of "real world" reading activities in the assessment fostered the development of policies that encouraged instructional integrations of reading into varied contexts of learning, such as history, science and literature. However, the extent of these changes was not remarkable. Although some of the districts adopted some of the State-wide goals, and some

of the instructional changes were tied to some of the goals, a broad-reaching, coherent program based on a vision for student literacy learning, coupled with an instructional guidance system and supported by a revised governance structure (Smith and O'Day, 1991), was not evident at this early stage of the reform process.

Ultimately, systemic reform programs are judged in terms of whether students are accomplishing the desired outcomes. In the Maryland case the question is: "Are students reading better than they were before the reform initiatives?" At present we do not possess the student achievement data to address this question. But more fundamentally, even if we possessed achievement data, it would be premature to conclude that systemic reform has succeeded, as the proponents might prefer, or that it has failed as the critics have argued (Clark & Astuto, 1994), because the fundamental conditions of reform had not been implemented. Before judging the usefulness of a reform strategy, it is necessary to realize the conditions for schooling specified in terms of a consensus about learning outcomes, a coherent instructional framework, and a suitable governance structure to support teachers.

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